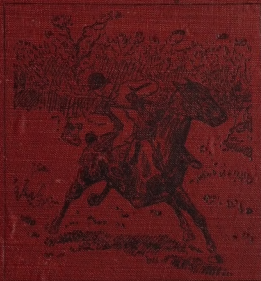


THE RUN OF THE SEASON



By
FINCH MASON.



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WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED

BY

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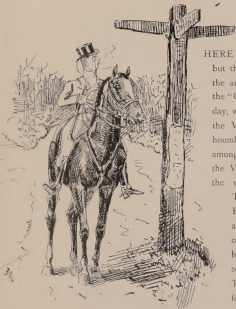


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THE RUN OF THE SEASON.



HERE could be no question but that what was known in the annals of the Hunt as the "Chucklebury Common" day, was the best by far that the Vale of Buttercupshire hounds (better known amongst hunting men as the V. B. H.) had enjoyed the whole of the season.

The noble master, the Earl of Rabbitborough, after a careful perusal of his methodically kept hunting journal, said so: his huntsman, Tom Trimmer, said so: the followers of the Hunt to a man said so: and

I have not the slightest doubt in my own mind that the hounds themselves—not to mention the horses—would have said so as well, had they been able to express their feelings on the subject.

What rendered this particular day more remarkable too than usual, was the fact, not of their having an extra good run from the place they did, viz.,

Sloppington Wood, but their having a fun at all. It was quite an unexpected pleasure indeed. A Vale of Buttercupshire sportsman reading in the hunting appointments for the forthcoming week, that the hounds are to meet on such







and such a day at Chucklebury Common, immediately makes up his mind for an indifferent day's sport, and provides for the same accordingly. Well he knows that they will trot on to draw Slopington Wood, and that in Slopington Wood, the chances are ten to one that they will remain all day.

"A nasty place them Slopington Woods," would remark Tom Trimmer, for the hundredth time, as he blew his hounds out of covert at the end of a weary day. "A nasty place them Slopington Woods, neither good for 'oss nor 'ound—nor man neither if it comes to that." And Tom, it must be allowed, had some right to speak feelingly on the subject, for not only had he known more than once what it was to lose a hound in its depths, but it was no uncommon circumstance for him and his horse to find themselves suddenly floundering about in one of its innumerable bogs in the course of the day's amusement. And nobody likes being bogged—not even a huntsman. In truth it was a nasty place. To begin with, it was in extent quite a young forest, very wet in places, and

full of man and horse traps in the shape of bogs and deep ditches. Of foxes there were always plenty, but somehow they always seemed to have a rooted and unaccountable aversion for leaving their fastnesses

and instead of, like good sporting foxes (which they were not), boldly facing the open, thereby affording the visitors some fun for their money, they would content themselves with playing a game of "hide and seek" on a large scale, with Tom Trimmer and his hounds: running backwards and forwards, now round the outside, then right through the heart of the wood by way of variation. With one or two foxes afoot at the same time, it reminded one forcibly of the "cross hands and down the middle" of the old-fashioned country dance. One cunning old stager was in the habit of amusing himself with the redoubtable V. B. H. in this



*Colonel Punter
(Late of Popham Priory)*

fashion time after time, and when he had had enough of it, would climb deliberately up into the fork of a venerable ivy covered oak—just such a tree indeed as would have gladdened the heart of the Merry Monarch



"Now you're Thure I'm not robbing you? Quite Thure?"
Quite Thure?"

himself at that period of his career when he was being hunted by red-nosed Oliver Cromwell and his psalm-singing myrmidons—from whose snug recesses he could laugh in his sleeve—if the expression can be applied to a fox—as he beheld the discomfiture of his noisy pursuers at his sudden and unaccountable disappearance. Unfortunately for him, repeated success made the old fellow careless, and one fine day, drawing things a little too fine, the



Colonel Mellis Moss
(of Popham Priory)

M. Moss Junr

keen eyes of Tom Trimmer caught sight of his white-tagged brush peeping out from his hiding place, just as he had settled himself in safety as he fondly imagined. Tom's climbing days were over long ago, so the second whip, an active young fellow who could go up a tree like a lamplighter, was dispatched to fetch our fox down from his perch, which he very quickly did; not, though, before he had been bitten through the hand in so doing. The hounds quickly did the rest, you may be sure.

Chucklebury Common, then, being voted by common consent a most indifferent meet, so far as sport was concerned, the members of the Hunt went in for making the best of a bad job by converting it into a gigantic picnic. With this object in view, they would mount their quietest horses, put on their warmest clothes, and provide themselves at starting with a



"My son, my Lord,
just come from
Arrer for the
Obligdays!"

"Poor Harrow"! murmured his Lordship

double allowance of sandwiches, strong waters—or sherry; as the case might be—and cigars. There was sure not to be any occasion for

"Cigars thrown away in a hurry,
And bridle-reins gathered up tight,"

on a Chucklebury Common day, they argued. Take it altogether, too, it wasn't bad fun. Arrived in Sloppington Wood, they would get together in one of the big rides, and then, ignoring the hounds altogether, chatter, chatter, chatter, would be the order of the day. "Voices in the wood," with a vengeance! Occasionally somebody would hear or think he heard a holloa, when away



Mr Moss sen.

they would all tear at a gallop, only to settle down in another ride, and gossip away harder than ever. This sort of thing would be continued at intervals during the day, and of course added very considerably to the fun. It did some good too, as it prevented their horses from catching cold, besides stirring up the livers of such of their riders who were troubled with torpidity in that portion of their human anatomy.

It was on a fine hunting morning, then, in the first



Miss Becky Moss.



Mr Melton Moss.

week in January that Tom Trimmer, punctual to the moment, trotting up to the meet at Chucklebury Common, with his many-coloured beauties clustering round his horse's heels, and glancing round at the extra large crowd, composed of what he elegantly called "all sorts," assembled to meet him (doubtless in consequence of it being holiday time), prophesied to the first whip that in all probability they had a worse day than usual in store for them.

Tom, who looked upon fox-hunting as a very serious matter, and therefore by no means to be trifled with, could not abide holiday people, characterising them, in his dry way, as "a lot o' silly folk who do

nowt but get into people's way" (meaning of course *his* way). In due time my lord cantered becomingly up, and having exchanged greetings all round, and his hack for a hunter, the word is given, and forthwith a move is made.

Now, as I have already mentioned, it was an established rule that whenever they met at Chucklebury Common, Sloppington Wood was the first covert to be drawn. However, on this particular occasion, the order



Mr Moss sen.

was given, much to everybody's astonishment, to go to Popham Priory, a little further on.

Popham, as the natives called it, until lately had been the residence of Colonel Punter, in whose family it had been for generations past. Unfortunately, what with bad times and one cause or another, the Colonel found himself quite unable to hang on at the old place any longer. In due course, therefore, it came to the hammer, and in the end was knocked down, after what was described as "some spirited bidding," to the well-known

South African millionaire, Colonel Melter Moss, who had now been located in his new "diggings," as he termed the Priory, some six weeks. Now

it was a peculiarity of the Colonel's that he liked "bossing the show" on all occasions whenever possible. When he heard, therefore, that the

hounds were coming shortly to Chucklebury Common, less than a mile from his new purchase, it occurred to him that if he could only persuade Lord Rabbitborough to change the venue to Popham, it would be a rare chance for him to distinguish himself. Accordingly he wrote "right away" as he expressed it, to his lordship, explaining his wants. Alas! the champagne breakfast he held out as an inducement had in reality exactly the

opposite effect to that intended; my lord, as a matter of fact, hating anything of the kind. He was conservative in his notions, too, and this he made his excuse for not



"Blooding" The young Squire

complying with his correspondent's request. "Chucklebury Common," he wrote, "had been from time immemorial the established meet for the hounds when they came that way, and he regretted, therefore, that he did not see his way to making any alteration. He saw no objection, however, to trotting on to Popham first, and drawing the Home Wood, instead of taking it later in the day as formerly. If this would do, he should have much pleasure, etc. etc."

So the Colonel's vision of a hunt breakfast, with a big marquee on the lawn, and the band of the Militia to play the company in and frighten their horses, vanished into space, as so many such "castles in the air" are only too apt to do, and the gallant gentleman was reduced to getting hold of as many stragglers as he could to

"come in and have a glass of champagne." And as there are generally on these occasions plenty of sportsmen to be found, endowed apparently

with a chronic thirst, and ready to take on anything—champagne if they can get it, strong ale if they can't—the worthy gentleman was not altogether disappointed with his morning's work.

My lord, with a freezing politeness that somehow sent a cold shiver down the millionaire's back, declined his pressing invitation to do likewise but—hoped the Colonel had a fox for him in the Home Wood.

"Eaps ol 'em!" was the confident reply.

"That's all right," laughed Lord Rabbit-

borough, as he and Tom Trimmer and Co. trotted off to draw the Home Wood.





Finch Mason

Bob Brinslon



"Hold your noise ye silly Man,

And the Colonel's confidence was not misplaced, for hardly had the hounds been thrown into covert before their joyous voices proclaimed that a fox was afoot.

"A bagman for a 'pony'!" muttered my lord.

And it looked like it, certainly, for after running round

and round the wood several times in a "dunno where I are" sort of style, the fox made a bold dash for liberty across the park, with the pack at his brush, being eventually pulled down in front of the house.

"What did I tell yer?" roared the delighted Colonel at the top of his voice.

The usual obsequies having been performed: the brush given to Miss Moss, and Master Maurice Moss, the Colonel's youngest, most artistically "blooded" by Tom Trimmer, Lord Rabbitborough, declining his host's invitation to draw the Home Wood again, gave the word to make a move for Stoppington Wood.





The
Relief
of
Lady
Smith

And now came the extraordinary part of it. Tom and his hounds, as before, had scarcely entered the covert; the "coffee-housers" had barely had time to collect together; the two whips had only just got to their respective posts: when a whimper was heard, quickly developing into a chorus, a loud joyous chorus, evidently emanating from the throat of every individual hound in the pack, the sound of which caused Lord Rabbitborough to vacate the ride and go crashing through the thickest part of the wood in the direction it came from, and the large field to throw away their cigars and make the

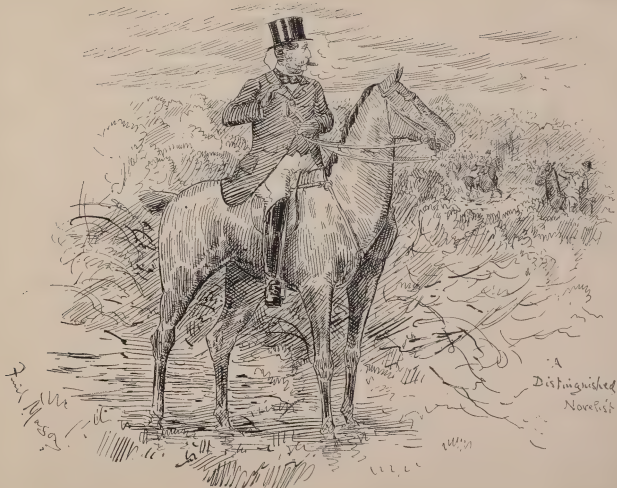


best of their way as fast as they could towards the gate by which they had entered barely ten minutes ago—my lord's second horseman, a sage of much experience as to the run of a fox, having expressed his opinion that they had got hold of a "good 'un" this time, and one that meant facing the open, and that quickly, unless, he added, "some o' them holiday folk mobs 'im." Hardly has he given utterance to this prophecy than a most unmistakeable holloa is heard in the distance, then another, followed by three or four twangs of the horn. A smile lightens up the wooden features of the old servant at the welcome sound. "Eh, but I thought he'd niver stop long with sich a nise as that behind him," chuckled he, as he put his horse into a canter, and followed leisurely in the wake of the field, turning round in his saddle to advise sundry little boys and girls on ponies of all sorts and sizes who were pounding away behind, to "come you along o' me, my dears, and I'll pint out to 'ee which way to go to see the fox killed, without fear o' breakin' any o' your little neckses."

"Oh, but I want to *jump*!" exclaims little Blanche Nethercote, a charming eight-year-old dot, with a mass of golden hair flying in the breeze, looking up at the old groom with a pouting face.



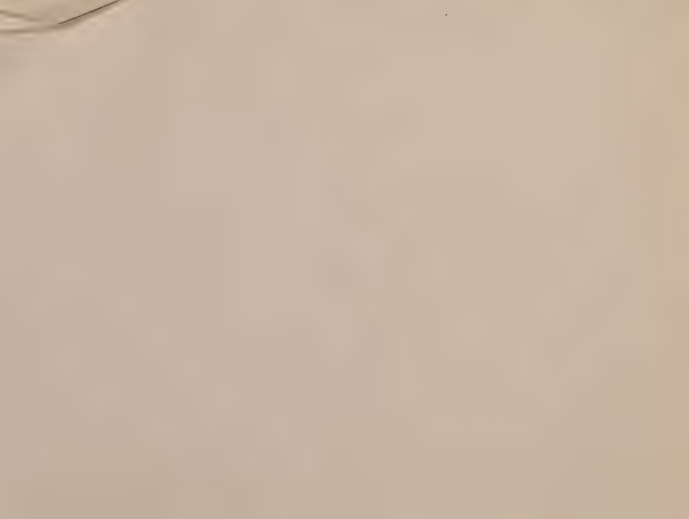
The Rev. M. Mallard
(Bishop's Saddle)



A
Distinguished
Novelist



"Confounded you, Sir why don't you get out of the way?
You might have given me a bad fall!"



"Oh, you marn't jump, missy," is the reply. "Why, what hever would your mar say?"

"Why, I know, bless you! she'll say, says she, 'I'll never trust you to that wicked old rascal, never no more, nor let you go a huntin' again neither! Think as if of now!'"

Miss Blanche evidently did not see things in the same light; indeed, judging from the expression on her rosy face, she was much put out at the prospect of no fencing.

But to return to our tale. He was a traveling gentleman, who had only arrived in Sloopington Wood the day before, having come on a visit to one of the resident foxes, an old friend whom he had not seen for some time. As ill luck would have it, going out for a stroll that fine morning, he fell in with the hounds. Not knowing the wood at all, and being in rare

condition, and a game fox as well, he at once made up his mind for the open, much to the satisfaction of his friends of the vulpine species in Sloopington

Wood, who were, needless to say, glad to get rid of the nasty hounds on such easy terms. So, with an independent flick of his white-tagged brush, he emerged from the wood right under the very nose of little Sam Spriggins (from town, who promptly headed him—at least, he *would* have done so had not Joe, the first whip, who was on the watch hard by, with commendable promptitude promptly seized him by the throat just at the critical moment, the while he hissed into the cockney's startled ear

"Hold your noise, do, ye silly man!"

So off went the fox—of course the biggest that ever was seen, he really was a magnificent fellow—and when he was well away, and not before, Joe's shrill view



holloa was wafted on the breeze, to the delighted ears of Tom Trimmer and the field, who could scarcely believe their senses when they heard the welcome sound. What a scene of excitement now ensues! Through the wood rush the hounds, bristling for blood, and giving tongue as they go in most melodious fashion.

The noble master's face lights up with delight as he listens. The finest notes that ever emanated from the throat of a Patti or a Nilson never equalled this, he thinks. *Crash* they come in a body over the fence, making it bend with their weight, and away over the pasture beyond at a racing pace. Close behind them rides Tom Trimmer, whose horse, putting his foot in a rabbit-hole on landing over the fence, is all but down. "Hold up, 'oss!" roars Tom, as he pulls him together, and gallops on as hard as ever he can go. My lord lands lightly by his



"why, Damme! it's a better one than mine

side, a smile of the most perfect enjoyment on his cheery face, and gallops on close to his hounds, taking the fences just as they come, and neither turning to the right or the left. A heavy weight, his only anxiety at the present moment is, that his second horse may turn up at the right moment.

Close up with my lord and his huntsmen ride the top sawyers of the Hunt. The powerfully built jack-booted elderly gentleman in black, with a look of supreme contentment on his jolly face which admits of no denial, whose flat and wide-brimmed hat, stuck well on the back of his head, is fastened underneath the chin by a broad black band, and who shoves his horse at everything that comes in his way, the bigger the better, with the nerve of a boy of sixteen, is the Honourable "Bob" Brimston, who, if not what is termed a "good" horseman, is certainly one of the *hardest*

that ever got into a saddle. The slim, well set up man, with blonde moustache and bushy whiskers, and rather a care-worn expression of countenance, also attired in black, and wearing jack boots, riding by his side, and like his companion going perfectly straight, is Major Swellville, ex-guardsman, and one of the most popular novelists of the day. The youthful swell in scarlet on the bay mare, riding with a loose rein, as if he had a spare neck in his pocket and a fresh horse at the end of every other field, is young Jack Rapid, most sporting of undergraduates, and one of the shining lights of the Christchurch drag. The elderly gentleman, also in scarlet, with the white whiskers, who is riding alongside of him, laughing in his sleeve at the young 'un's rashness, is Mr. Revel, a once celebrated gentleman rider and racehorse owner. Dame Fortune not having been kind to him in the latter capacity, he no longer keeps a stud of hunters of his own, but rides horses "on sale" for a celebrated London dealer. What a contrast his quiet, steady style of riding is to young Rapid's flashy performance! That five-year-old chestnut, who he is now so artistically handling over some awkward-looking

rails in the corner of the field, will be sold for three hundred or more before the day is out, you may depend. A nag that has carried "old" Revel, as

he is familiarly called, well through a run is always considered something out of the common, as nobody knows better than Mr. Slyboots, the dealer who mounts him. Who is this thin spare man in black, "got up" to perfection from top to toe, and sailing away very much at his ease apparently at a pace very little faster than an ordinary canter, but which a good many, on drawing up alongside of him, find uncommonly difficult to keep up with? A parson? Why, certainly! And if he's only half as good in the pulpit as he is in the saddle, why, he'll do, and that is all about it.

A little to the left, with their attendant admirers, Captains Dash, Smash, and Crash, ride pretty Miss Bluebell and her equally charming rival, little Miss Muffet, both horribly jealous of each other, and each lady determined to cut down the other, or perish in the attempt. Pounding along in the rear come the remainder of the large field, hoping devoutly that there will soon be a "check" to enable them to get on something like terms with





"Hallo! old Floreat Eloia! What price Harrow?"

the bounds. The force of Circumstances, however, in many instances is against this desirable consummation. In Jack Sprat's case, for instance, 'tis the pace that kills," for the little bay 'oss that he has hired for

hardly up to her weight, was obliged to pull up, her steed being literally done to a turn. Old Mr. Scrooby of Pincham Park, and a very keen hunt as a rule, *might* have caught them up when they checked, but he



There are no two ways about it, The American style of riding has its Advantages



For instance - Look what a lot of Weight it takes off a Horse's Back !

the day, at the cost of two guineas, is mean-spirited enough to give up the ghost in the middle of a ploughed field quite early in the run. Jolly Mrs. Plumper too, who is not exactly a feather, and whose horse was

could not resist stopping to change hats with a scarecrow, and in consequence never saw the bounds again all day.

"Eh, but he's an awful near min is Squire Scrooby," remarked



"Hallo, General! Captured De Wet at last? eh?"

old Jimmy Kiff, who was mending a hedge close by, and had eyed the whole proceeding with unspeakable relish. Jimmy told the story with immense applause that same evening to the assembled company in the taproom at the "Cat and Fiddle."

Young Larkins (Eton) and Talbot, major (Harrow), desperate rivals in love and war, have of course been riding jealous of each other ever since they found. "Floreat Etona!" shouts the former in triumph, as passing the other he jumps a fence some lengths ahead of him. Alas! the words are hardly out of his mouth before his mare, putting



her foot in a rabbit-hole on landing, comes heavily down. "Hallo, old Floreat Etona, what price Harrow?" yells his hated rival, in derision, as, successfully over, he passes him in a hand canter. Major Cracker was going well, when his horse fell with him at a fence, and afterwards tried to eat his master as he lay on the ground. "I've no doubt often eaten horse without being aware of it," quoth the gallant officer afterwards, "but I've no notion of a horse making a meal of me: what!"

About the first to come to grief is a distinguished member of Colonel Melter Moss's house party, in the shape

of Mr. Somerville Spangle, the well-known tragedian, who, making for what he thinks is likely to prove an easy exit out of that horrid Sloppington Wood, lands handsomely into a pond t'other side. His mouth is so full of duckweed that it is all the poor man can do to gurgle out a feeble "I—am—*h-e-r-e!*" in response to his talented wife's somewhat sharp query of "Are you *there?*"

Tom Bouncer has been telling everybody all the morning that he intends in future to adopt the American style of riding—it takes such a lot of weight, he says, off a horse's back. He tries it to-day for the first time, and, it must be admitted, with considerable success.

Lady Smith, the sporting relict of Sir Samuel of that ilk, leaves her hat—and wig—behind her in one of those horrid bullfinches. Judge of her joy when



The Place where the Old Horse died.



Jack, the runner of the hunt, comes to the rescue in the very nick of time, with the missing articles in question.

"What a useful person you are, Jack!" exclaims her much-relieved ladyship as she hands Jack his well-earned sovereign.

Mr. James Jessamy, quite the dandy of the Hunt, was prevented from being with 'em, don't you know, by a fall. One of his top-boots came off in the stirrup and his

horse galloped off with it rejoicing. Poor Jimmy said it was horribly uncomfortable, walking about in a wet field with only a silk stocking on. Needless to say, that celebrated Souseham brook stopped a good many. Some got handsomely over; some got handsomely in (and, between you and me, looked anything but handsome when they got out), whilst the majority wouldn't have it at any price.

Well, the run, like all other good things, was bound to have an ending, and this one terminated by the good fox being pulled down by old Barbara just as he was crawling through a hedge, dead beat. Time — fifty-five minutes, with only one check, and as hard as ever they could go all the time. Of the large field who met the hounds in the morning, only Lord Rabbitborough; Tom Trimmer; old Mr. Revel; Messrs. Brimstone and Swellville; that hard-riding member of the cloth, the Rev. Mr. Mallard; and last but not least,

those two fair damsels, the Misses Bluebell and Muffet, with their respective pilots, Captains Smash and Dash, were up at the finish. And now the question was, who was to have the brush of this gallant

fox? The rival Amazons just mentioned had topped the last fence almost together, so that, as Tom Trimmer tersely put it, there "really wasn't a ha'porth o' difference between the pair of 'em." My lord, therefore, as may well be imagined, was sorely perplexed as to what he should do. One of the two ladies was bound to have the proud trophy, that was very certain: the question was, which? "Happy thought!" he suddenly exclaimed laughingly to Parson Mallard, "I'll tell you what we'll do, we'll toss

up!" And he did too! Heads for Miss Bluebell, tails for Miss Muffet. And Miss Bluebell won. And thus ended the great Chucklebury Common day with the Vale of Buttercupshire hounds.







